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# **Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950**

**1969**

## **Chapter 10**

# **Socialism and Nationalism**

## Socialism and Nationalism

Socialists had reason to hope that their cause would triumph as opposition to the war mounted in Europe and as soldiers or sailors on both sides mutinied. Even sceptics might be silenced by the 'seeming miracle', as Bunting called it, of the Russian upheaval. It far outstripped the wildest dreams of socialists themselves, who 'never hoped for so early a fruition of their movement'. 'This is a bourgeois revolution, but arriving when the night of capitalism is far spent', wrote Jones in March 1917, 'It cannot be a mere repetition of previous revolutions. It partakes infinitely more of a victory for the proletariat, as well as for the industrial capitalist.' With surprising insight, considering South Africa's isolation, Jones recognized that Russia was heading for a revolution 'by the side of which this and all previous ones are but "shopkeepers' riots" in immensity'. The Russian 'elemental mass' was about to enter 'the International class struggle for human emancipation. The day of its coming seems immeasurably nearer by this awakening.<sup>1</sup>

Enthusiasm kept pace with the spread of soviets, the councils of workmen and soldiers, in Russia. She of all countries, 'clear-sighted, audacious, unfaltering, with magnificent contempt for the bogies and fetishes that capitalism would have us dread or revere, has suited the action to the word', wrote Bunting in June. His election manifesto of that month urged South Africans 'to rise to the occasion' by 'following the bold and inspiring lead of the Russian Workers'. When the revolution moved to its climax in the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in November the International declared that they had incarnated the theories of Karl Marx. 'The Word becomes Flesh in the Council of Workmen.'<sup>2</sup>

Two hundred socialists from the Reef, Pretoria, Durban, Kimberley and Cape Town met in the Johannesburg Trades Hall in August to send Andrews to the proposed peace conference in Stockholm. It was a great occasion. Among the main speakers were Sigamoney, of Durban's Indian Workers' Union, and Selope Thema, secretary of the African National Congress. A number of Africans attended. Outraged by this breach of the racial taboo, the Labour party's executive, then meeting in the same building, adjourned to a near-by hotel in protest against whites and Africans sitting together in conference. Unperturbed by this protest, the socialists passed a resolution moved by Dunbar instructing their delegate to demand peace 'on the basis of the complete destruction of the capitalist system'. This was 'mere

demagoguery ' noted Andrews at a later period. 'Dunbar and his supporters were more revolutionary than Lenin and the Bolsheviks.'<sup>3</sup>

Andrews sailed in August to represent the ISL, the Cape SDF, the Jewish Socialist Society in Cape Town, the S.A. Peace and Arbitration Society in Cape Town, the Indian Workers' Union in Durban, the Native Workers' Union in Johannesburg, and Kimberley Socialists. He took with him a report ' on the state of the working-class movement in South Africa, and the state of the " minority " socialist movement and its origin through cleavages on the war question'. The report also challenged Creswell's status and claims to represent the labour movement at the allied socialist conference in London. For the white working class shared to a great extent 'the illusion of all white master communities, Athenian democracies, that they represent the whole of the people and that the mass of the serfs or slaves beneath are politically non-existent'.<sup>4</sup>

It was an optimistic report. The League, it claimed, had survived constant persecution for its stand against war and racism, and was now the only vigorous political organization of the working classes. The Labour party might win elections, but these were no test of real power. The League's fight against racism had far greater world-wide significance and was making headway also among white workers. Ten of the thirteen members of the League's executive committee were wage earners and staunch supporters of trade unionism without colour bars. The great bulk of Africans had not yet acquired a class consciousness, but the League was breaking through the barriers by means of propaganda and trade union organization. 'It would be hard for our European comrades to realize the significance of Indian and Native delegates sitting in a working-class gathering in South Africa. The very fact of these black fellow workers voicing their class consciousness with us lifted the Conference to a high pitch of enthusiasm.' Though not representative of the great masses, they were ' the advance guard of that mass in its struggle towards articulation'. The League's propaganda and its first fruits were of ' mighty significance for the millions of the coloured proletariat in all parts of the world, and a surety that they too will unitedly tread the path of the working class International '.

One of the first fruits was the Durban Indian Workers' Industrial Union. Gordon Lee, a follower of De Leon, took the initiative in forming it along the lines of the IWW. 'Some croakers here, Socialist and Labour,' he reported, 'say we cannot organize the coolies.' Yet he recruited in less than six months an appreciable following of printing, tobacco, laundry and dock workers. The 'common Indian worker' was realizing at last that Indian capitalists were as much his enemy as any white boss. Miners, municipal workers and the 'sugar slaves' stretched out their hands for aid, and the union would soon be able to stand alone under its own elected leaders.<sup>5</sup> B.

L. Sigomoney took over from Lee and soon became prominent in left-wing circles. He was elected the vice-chairman of a socialist conference held at Durban in October 1917 to debate the rival merits of 'pure' industrial action and parliamentary politics. In January 1918 he represented his union at the ISL's annual conference in Johannesburg. This, too, was a memorable occasion. Never before had the League included among its delegates a member of the darker races; and it rejoiced at having made great ideological progress towards non-racial labour solidarity.<sup>6</sup>

'Organize and educate' produced better results when applied to Africans than to whites, discovered Charles Dones, a miner and member of the League's management committee. This was said in August after he had addressed the first of a series of classes on the labour movement held in the Johannesburg Trades Hall for Africans. Asked what they wanted, they replied 'Sifuna zonke'- everything! 'What White Union,' remarked Bunting, 'ever aimed so high or so true?'<sup>7</sup> From the classes emerged later in the year the Industrial Workers Union of Africa, one of the first African trade unions, described by communists in later years as 'an "all-in" Industrial trade union, with the idea of roping in the Native and other unorganized Non-European workers'.<sup>8</sup> In 1918, however, when Bunting and others stood trial on a charge of inciting Africans to strike, the organizers minimized the union's role and said that it was no more than 'a little body of native students of socialism'.<sup>9</sup> At least five of the students were police informers and detectives. One of them, Wilfrid Njobe, had become the union's secretary; another, R. Moorosi, had been elected to the committee and represented it at a meeting with the APO. When warned that spies were present, Bunting assured the members that they had nothing to fear from the police.

Police and press kept a watchful eye on the League; and F. S. Malan, the minister of mines, hurled threats at the 'agitators' who 'played with fire' by inciting Africans to strike. Undaunted, the African National Congress called on its people to support the IWA and make it strong, for it could teach employers that workers wanted higher wages. The prime minister, Louis Botha, told a deputation from the Transvaal ANC to steer clear of international socialists. S. M. Makgatho, the provincial president, replied that Congress had decided on its own to call a strike against the Native Administration Bill. The Labour right wing, joining in the red-baiting, closed the Trades Hall to the League's non-racial gatherings. Bunting showed his disapproval by resigning as honorary secretary of the hall's management committee, which then gave the League notice to vacate its offices. Crawford, more tolerant, invited Talbot Williams, a leader of the Transvaal APO and organizer of the IWA, to address the Industrial Federation's annual conference in December. The federation refused to admit Coloured delegates from the Cape. Williams then declined to speak at a 'Pure

White Labour Congress'; and delivered his address instead before a large audience of Africans and Coloured in Johannesburg on 9 January 1918.

'We who have never enjoyed our just rights, either in the labour market or politically,' he said, 'have but one weapon and that is the organization of black labour, upon which the whole commercial and mining industry rests today.' This was the only way of bringing white trade unionists to their senses. Their great grievance against the black man was that he sold his labour cheaply. Yet they worked at the sewerage plant for 5s. a day, were hired as railway porters at 6s. 6d. and went on strike at the Van Ryn mine because they wanted white men to be given the jobs of Coloured waste packers at a rate of 7s. a day. Trade unionists who refused to work 'within five yards of clean respectable intelligent Coloured men at a skilled trade', willingly worked 'side by side with a raw blanketed native' so long as he was a subordinate at their beck and call. They would rather dine and wine with mine owners than combine with their darker fellow workers. Servile, afraid of competition and prejudiced, the white man was a supervisor of labour and not a genuine worker. 'The true worker, the backbone of labour in this country, is the brown and the black man, who are now organizing against this federation of rotters.'<sup>10</sup>

Bunting, no less optimistic, reported that 'the different races of workers of this country, whites, coloured, natives, Indians, are rapidly coming together to form one great Industrial Workers' Union of Africa.'<sup>11</sup> The desired unity never took shape. Even Williams found it expedient, against the advice of the socialists, to organize Africans and Coloured in separate unions under a joint executive. White workers, with few exceptions, rejected the vision of 'proletarian freedom', but not because of any servility such as Williams alleged. They were in a strong bargaining position and exploited the advantages of a growing industrialism that outstripped the supply of skilled labour. Strikes in 1917 resulted in wage increases or a shorter working week for printers in Johannesburg, tailors, bakers and hairdressers in Cape Town, and men employed on the diamond mines. Policemen who struck work in Cape Town in January 1918 were less successful, and received only a suspended sentence for refusing duty. The socialists hailed them as young Afrikaners with a great revolutionary potential; and accused Crawford of leading white workers away from an alliance with Africans into a policy of collaboration with employers.

Even the former international socialist, Forrester Brown, the secretary of the miners' union and president of the SAIE', had turned reactionary 'under the baleful influence of Crawford, the apostle of Brother Capital and Brother Labour'. The white workers backed the Chamber of Mines in its efforts to sidetrack the inevitable revolution by keeping natives in subjection and throwing sops to whites.<sup>12</sup> Crawford presented a list of fifteen demands to the Chamber in July 1918 on behalf

of five unions. They asked, among other things, for the dismissal of seventy-four Coloured drill sharpeners, the cancellation of a wage freeze clause adopted in 1916, an increase in the mechanics' pay to 8 2s. a week, a closed shop agreement and a paid holiday on 1 May. The Chamber agreed to maintain the prevailing practice for the employment of Coloured on the mines, introduced an improved war bonus scheme, and donated 10,000 to the Federation's cooperative stores instituted by Crawford to combat the rise in prices.

Africans, who suffered most from the steep rise in prices, received neither a cost of living allowance nor an increase in wages. The slightest display of militancy on their part evoked a violent reaction. When African miners on the East Rand boycotted concession stores in February 1918, the police arrested the pickets and broke the boycott. Botha used the occasion to lecture parliament on the evils of African trade unionism and the disastrous consequences that might follow from the activities of white men who 'were going to the native kraals urging them to combine'.<sup>13</sup> The capitalist press was both more ferocious and less accurate. It printed extracts from Talbot Williams's address blamed the boycott on 'ill-balanced and fanatical Socialists of the baser sort', and detected the sinister influence of the 'IWW', which was 'notoriously financed by Germany'. The socialists of the ISL denied having had anything to do with the boycott. Indeed they regarded it as a 'misguided tactic', an attack on the branch rather than the root. Their only contribution, they said, was to collaborate with the Industrial Workers Union of Africa in compiling a leaflet in Sesutu and Zulu. It was the first serious attempt to put Marx's clarion call for unity into an African language: 'Let there be no longer any talk of Basuto, Zulu or Shangaan. You are all labourers. Let Labour be your common bond. Deliver yourself from the chains of capitalism.'<sup>14</sup>

A few months later the socialists faced more serious charges in consequence of an African strike wave on the Rand. White mechanics employed at the municipal power station came out on strike in May for 8. 2s. a week, the equivalent, they claimed, of their pre-war wage of 6. They won their demand after leaving the town in darkness for several nights. Impressed at the success of this operation, Africans working in the municipal sanitary services asked for a modest rise from 1s. 8d. to 2s. 6d. a day. But they were black and handled lavatory buckets, not electric generators. The council refused, some fifty men struck work, and all except fifteen were convicted. Another 152 men then came out, initially in protest against having to do the work of the arrested strikers. T. G. Macfie, the chief magistrate and a staunch ally of Crawford, sentenced the 152 strikers on 12 June to two months' hard labour for breach of contract. They would be compelled to do the same work as before, he told them, without pay and under armed guard. They would be shot if they tried to escape and flogged if they refused to work. The harsh threats and the contrast between this treatment and the concessions made to the white strikers

infuriated the African public. The ANC launched a campaign for the prisoners' release which soon developed into a demand for a general wage increase of 1s. a day, to be enforced if necessary by a general strike on 1 July.

Socialists and ANC leaders disapproved. Makgatho warned a meeting of nearly 2,000 Africans that striking was dangerous. Even socialists, being white, would join in shooting down Africans. The League retorted that it could have no part in the 'more reactionary, middle-class and religious-cum-racial tendencies 'of Congress, though' the close coincidence of native and working-class interests ' might yet force it to play a useful role.<sup>15</sup> T. P. Tinker, the League's secretary, told Africans that they were too badly organized to succeed in a strike which was bound to give the enemy an excuse for violence. The ISL claimed that its job was to 'agitate, educate, organize', and not to instigate strikes. Ninety per cent of the workers were ' still sunk in ignorance and servility'. Much work would have to be done before white and black workers could bring off really effective industrial action.<sup>16</sup>

Macfie urged the SAIF to organize a defence force to protect women and property against the expected strike. Crawford and Forrester Brown agreed and offered to raise workers' battalions. The whites, commented Bunting, assumed that it was their duty to shoot down helots at the smallest sign of discontent; ' and one of the darkest episodes in the history of South Africa Labour is the attempted enlistment of white trade unionists in the Defence Force for the avowed purpose of so shooting them down'.<sup>17</sup> The daily press, the Bishop of Pretoria, and the Native Recruiting Corporation took fright and joined Africans in condemning Macfie's judgement. To relieve tension the government ordered the release of the strikers, whose sentences were hurriedly suspended by the Supreme Court on 28 June. Botha interviewed an African deputation led by Saul Msane and promised to investigate their grievances.

The strike was called off, but 15,000 men employed at three mines refused to work on 1 July. Police and troops rushed to the compounds and drove the men down the shafts after serious clashes at Ferreira mine and the Robinson Deep, where they fought back with pickhandles, jumpers,\* axes and iron pipes. The grievances commissioner, J. B. Moffat, chief magistrate of the Transkei, accepted Msane's diagnosis. ' The whole trouble in the compounds is due to the colour bar. A native may know his work very well, but on account of his colour he cannot obtain advancement.' If those who possessed the necessary qualifications could obtain better pay, ' it would encourage them to improve in their work and would bring about peace and satisfaction'.<sup>18</sup>

The police arrived at a different diagnosis. They prosecuted Bunting, Tinker and Hanscombe of the League, together with five Africans - D. S. Letanka, vice-president

of the Transvaal Congress; L. T. Mvabaza, a director of Abantu Batho; and J. Ngojo, H. Kraai and A. Cetyiwe, three members of the IWA, For 'the first time in South Africa', noted T. D. M. Skota, author of the Black Folks' Who's Who, 'members of the European and Native races, in common cause united, were arrested and charged together because of their political activities'.<sup>19</sup> The accused disclaimed direct responsibility for the strikes. The League, said Bunting, preached socialism and industrial unionism, and approved of strikes only when preceded by sound trade union organization. 'If any public organization called a strike,' he added, 'it was not the ISL but the Native Congress, with which the Socialists are at arm's length.'<sup>20</sup> The prosecution's case collapsed after its chief witness Luke Massina, a government informer, had admitted in cross-examination to having given perjured evidence. The attorney-general declined to indict the accused before the Supreme Court.

Moffat commented caustically on the League's claim to have done no more than educate and organize Africans for industrial unionism. This was like 'teaching children to play with matches round an open barrel of gunpowder'. Socialist propaganda would make a catastrophe inevitable if reasonable grounds of complaint were not removed. Low wages were not, however, a legitimate grievance according to Moffat. The men volunteered to work on the mines for 2s. a shift. Like other people, they should buy less if prices were high. But he said the right things about the colour bar. Africans and Coloured would not be content to do rough work only for ever. To arrest their advance would antagonize them and provoke industrial disputes. The tendency for the men to settle down and become permanent miners should be encouraged, while the government ought to withdraw the colour bar in the regulations. This would free it from the odium of being a party to obstacles that prevented Africans from rising as their industry and ability entitled them. Finally, he remarked, so long as natives are denied the rights of citizenship as Parliamentary voters there can be no real contentment in the country.' These were wise words. They sounded the spirit of traditional Cape liberalism; and were ignored.

Some years later Andrews made this comment on the episode: 'of course, when the workers had taken their decision and were on strike the ISL did all it could in support'.<sup>21</sup> The support it gave was negligible. The League did not possess the means to promote strikes and riots. Its membership had changed during its short life of three years. Most of the foundation members had drifted away, leaving a bare score of former Labour party members in the branches and only two on the management committee of thirteen. The gap was filled by a handful of white South Africans and a much larger number of immigrants from Europe, many of them Jewish, whom the League attracted by its solitary defence of the Russian revolution. Though tireless propagandists for Marxism, the new radicals lacked the industrial background of the League's founders. Andrews continued to be a source of strength



among white workers. There were others, like C. B. Tyler of the Building Workers' Industrial Union, who worked mainly in the white unions. Yet the League was more isolated in 1918 from the bulk of the labour movement than at any time since its formation.

It was far more isolated from the rest of the population. The League had no Coloured or African members. In spite of their insistence on the African's revolutionary role, the socialists had failed to bridge the language and social gap between themselves and the masses, or to formulate a theory acceptable to Coloured and African leaders. The binary model of standard Marxist theory did not fit South Africa's multiple structure of colour, class and cultural groups. Even Jones, a natural Marxist of high degree, failed to appreciate the dynamic qualities of an indigenous national movement. He and his associates insisted that class, not colour, marked the great divide. They refused to bear the label 'negrophile', or support the struggle of the Africans as an oppressed race. Their mission, they said, was to agitate among white workers for solidarity with blacks, and not to concern themselves with the civil disabilities of Indian storekeepers, African lawyers or Coloured middlemen.<sup>22</sup>

The socialists agreed that white workers, who were the vanguard of revolution, could enter the promised land only by combining with the African. Had not Marx declared that 'Labour cannot emancipate itself in the White while in the Black it is branded?' Regrettably, the white worker feared the effects of an African rising. To allay his fears and absolve themselves of blame for riots, the socialists condemned the use of violence and even strikes as instruments of social change. Strikes, though inevitable, were old-fashioned and would diminish as the working class drew nearer to the 'general strike' which would finally eliminate the capitalist's rule. Violence did not pay, especially when pursued by the black proletariat. There was a great danger of violence if Africans were left to assert themselves without organization and guidance. The business of the League was to avoid a blood bath by preaching industrial unity and providing patient instruction. This would ensure peaceful change without 'such evils as the white workers justifiably fear'.<sup>23</sup>

A greater danger stemmed from the tendency of the ruling class, nowhere more pronounced than in South Africa, to use violence in defence of the established order. In discussing this classic principle of revolutionary theory, the socialists acknowledged that their main reason for rejecting violence was the prospect that white workers would join in shooting Africans who revolted. What other conclusion could be drawn from Forrester Brown's offer to form workers' battalions to suppress African strikers? A member of the League and former war-on-warite, he had often urged his miners to accept Coloured workers on an equal footing and to organize African miners.<sup>24</sup> Now he had succumbed to the 'corrupting influence of

false labour organization, of labour-fakirdom, of mis-education, of capitalist flattery and bribery, of sectional and colour pride and prejudice'.<sup>25</sup> In less abusive words, Brown followed the dictates of his union members who earned ten times as much as the African, bossed him around, and feared that he might one day take over their jobs. They would put up with any kind of heresy from Brown as long as they believed that he would keep the door shut against the African.

The radical who appealed to white workers could hardly avoid reflecting their sentiments. Racial prejudice was 'insane' and 'suicidal', the socialists exclaimed, yet they confirmed it by alleging that Coloured workers had taken over the building trades in Cape Town, clerical posts in Durban, and semi-skilled work on the mines. The white man, they predicted, would be driven from all fields of employment unless he joined with the African in a struggle for equal pay.<sup>26</sup> This was the Labour party's argument over again. It pointed, not to inter-racial solidarity, but to the white labour policy of sheltered employment behind colour bars. The League made other concessions to prejudice. It was 'not out to get the native admitted into the White Labour Unions'; or to preach equality under capitalism, for this was indeed a contradiction in terms. Equality would come only under socialism, when there would be room and plenty for all.<sup>27</sup>

The League tried facing both ways and so fell between the stools of white supremacy and African nationalism. The white worker preferred racial solidarity to class war, and turned a deaf ear both to prophecies of disaster and promises of working-class power. Socialists assured him that he was not called upon to love the darker man as himself. Yet no lesser degree of devotion would persuade the African that he was being exploited as a worker and not as a member of an oppressed race. He claimed dignity, higher wages, better jobs and freedom from discrimination. The socialists gave him lectures on working-class emancipation and exhorted him to practise restraint until the day of liberation. They pleaded for unity and demanded equality. The concession failed to appease the whites and antagonized the leaders of national liberation who believed neither in the class theory nor in the vision of socialism.

The upsurge of nationalism in Europe made little immediate impact on the socialists. They saw in it the surface rumblings of a greater upheaval to come and equated it with Afrikaner nationalism. It was a 'petty bourgeois' movement which looked backward to the era of small property and would vanish before the wave of industrialism. This miscalculation can be traced, if only in part, to a narrow and dogmatic interpretation of the class theory. The socialists believed, with some justification, that industrial experience would detach the Afrikaner worker from the landowners and intellectuals who led the Nationalist party. The League opened a fund to pay for leaflets in Afrikaans, and expressed sympathy with republican

aspirations which tended to weaken the grip of British imperialism and could be used to help make landless Afrikaners see their true salvation in a socialist republic. But socialists could have no truck with the Nationalist party. It demanded self-determination for Afrikaners and denied it for Africans. It bandied words like *vrede* and *vryheid* about, which meant only freedom to exploit the African. If the Nationalists came to power, and Africans resisted with the methods used by the rebels of 1914, 'it would be the signal for the greatest massacre of the native workers known in the history of South Africa'.<sup>28</sup>

This was a fair assessment. The socialists made the mistake of applying the same kind of yardstick to African nationalism. It, too, was racist, they said, because it attacked whites generally and 'the Boer' in particular. Congress leaders refused to see that class cut every nationality in two. They drew their people away from the workers' struggles into a 'ruthless opportunism'. Andrews addressed Congress in December 1918 and came away sceptical. servility could go no further' than the conference's protestations of loyalty to the crown. Socialists applauded the Congress campaign against the pass laws in 1919, but denounced in extravagant terms the appeals made for help to Britain and the United States. African nationalists were said to play the same part as the right wing in the labour movement. They were the 'Labour Fakirs of black South Africa, black bell-weather for the capitalist class'.<sup>29</sup>

Two things need to be said about the League's approach. Africans were not racists. They wanted equality not black supremacy. They wished to free themselves from racial oppression and not to oppress the white man. In the second place, they were not Marxists. The basic cleavage in the society, as they saw it, did not run along class lines. White workers stood on the same side as Afrikaner landowners in the racial conflict. Africans would gain more by identifying themselves with British financial, industrial and commercial interests that profited by employing the largest possible number of low-paid workers, and therefore opposed the colour bar. In more abstract terms, African and Coloured concepts of South African politics postulated an inherent antagonism between British imperialism and Afrikaner nationalism. Queen Victoria, Cape liberalism and the Unionist party symbolized the one; Hertzog represented the other. Like other colonial peoples in later years, African and Coloured leaders appealed for British intervention against their immediate oppressors. The appeals were futile, but the underlying assumption was no more erroneous than the socialist concept of a simple two-class division. Congress at least gained a better insight than the socialists did into some realities.

It was Congress, and not the International Socialist League, that protested against the transfer of South West Africa to the Union. The Congress resolution, adopted at

its seventh annual conference in March 1919, asked that the conquered territory should be placed under France or America, if Britain refused for imperial reasons to annex the colony. To hand it to the Union would expose innocent natives to burgher tyranny and defeat the ideals that Africans had in view when insisting on British protection.<sup>30</sup> Abdurahman and Fredericks made a similar plea on behalf of the APO to the governor-general and Lord Milner, and asked them to forward a memorandum on the issue to the Versailles peace conference. The memorandum reviewed the disabilities of the coloured peoples in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, which they regarded as the slave State of the British Empire'. The people of South West wanted to be controlled directly by the Imperial government, and shrank with terror from the prospect of becoming a part of the Union. The APO prayed that the peace conference would not take any irrevocable step 'that is bound to lay up for the British Empire in general, as well as for the Union of South Africa in particular, the seeds of racial unrest and endless disputes and strife'. None of the conquered territories should be handed to South Africa until it had removed the colour bar from its constitution, extended full political rights to all coloured peoples, and repealed the republican laws which still disfigured the statute book. No racial privileges or disabilities should be tolerated in the conquered territories.<sup>31</sup>

The League's interest in African and Afrikaner nationalism dwindled after the war. The few hundred radical socialists on the Rand and in the port towns fixed their eyes on 'the Light from the East'. They celebrated the anniversary of the Russian revolution in November, and not the armistice. Copies of Andrews' pamphlet on the revolution and the Soviet constitution were widely circulated. Bunting drafted blue-prints for the coming revolution. The main burden would fall on the white workers, he wrote, if socialism came quickly in western Europe. Africans might form rural pitsos or soviets and send delegates to a national convention.<sup>32</sup> Even the Labour party moved to the left in preparation for a general parliamentary election. Creswell suggested a reunion with the League 'now that the war is happily at an end', and promised a revised constitution to bring the radicals into the fold. They derided the offer as 'amusing, if not impertinent'. Andrews, who had taken over the post of secretary of the League from Tinker, scoffed at 'Labour lieutenants of the capitalist class'. There could be no unity between the Labour party, which functioned within the system, and international socialists who were dedicated to its destruction.<sup>33</sup>

The socialists had trouble enough in keeping their own ranks united. A syndicalist faction was pressing hard for a withdrawal from all public elections. Members of the Cape SDF complained of its isolation. It had no young members and little contact with the Coloured, while Africans, who lived apart, were regarded 'as men coming from the bundu'<sup>34</sup> A. Z. Berman, J. Pick and M. Lopes decided to put theory into practice and formed the Industrial Socialist League in May 1918. They adopted

the principles of the I W W and its programme of industrial unionism, the general strike, and no parliamentary politics. Their first attempt to organize a trade union ended in a rout, when they found the police waiting for them at the factory. Like the SDP, Berman and his associates confined their activities largely to propaganda for socialism and the Russian revolution.

Johannesburg's unrepentant syndicalist, Andrew Dunbar, repeated his performance of 1910-12 with similar results. He fell foul of the League's leadership by conducting a vigorous campaign against parliamentary elections, craft unionism and the alleged reformist tendencies of the ISL. Bunting had described him three years earlier as an 'industrial Cincinnatus at his forge', a frequent defendant in sedition trials, and 'the most cheery of comrades, loyal of friends, reasonable of counsellors, good tempered and broadminded of collaborators, dogged and imperturbable of fighters'.<sup>35</sup> Andrews, however, said he was disloyal and dropped him from the League's list of public speakers. The League's annual conference in January 1919 rejected his views and defeated a motion to delete from the constitution a clause calling for participation in elections. Later in the year Dunbar and his followers formed a Johannesburg branch of the Industrial Socialist League.

The conference decided to end the League's 'splendid isolation' by cooperating with other socialist bodies, and adopted a statement of principles drafted by Jones. This asserted that Labour could not emancipate itself until it had conquered all race and colour prejudice. The League's task was to educate, agitate and organize for revolution. The socialists would go out to inspire Africans to take their place in the ranks of the world proletariat, and to educate white workers to organize and cooperate with their African fellow worker in mine, factory and workshop. Some delegates thought that more attention should be given to Afrikaners, as little could be done with 'semi-savages'; but two African delegates from the IWA indignantly repudiated the stigma of 'savagery'. Finally, conference adopted a new statement of aims. The original objective had been to spread the message of international socialism, industrial unionism, and anti-militarism. Now the League would go forward 'To establish the Socialist Commonwealth'.<sup>36</sup> Revolution appeared to be just round the corner at the beginning of 1919.

Jones did not attend the conference. He was being treated for tuberculosis in Pietermaritzburg's health centre. Here he wrote and distributed a pamphlet headed 'The Bolsheviks are Coming.' It explained, in English and Zulu, that Bolshevism meant 'the rule of the working class' and would soon spread everywhere. The capitalists feared that the workers of South Africa would follow the trail and also become free and independent. The working people should get ready for the world-wide Republic of Labour by combining regardless of colour, craft or creed. For 'while the black worker is oppressed, the white worker cannot be free'. Jones was turned

out of the centre and prosecuted, together with L. H. Greene, Pietermaritzburg's veteran socialist, on a charge of inciting to public violence. They submitted a statement which summarized the Communist Manifesto, and declared that their policy was the reverse of mob rule and violence. Their aim was 'to avoid on the industrial field the territorial strife of the pioneer and tribal days'.<sup>37</sup>

The prosecution called police officers, native affairs department officials, employers and Africans to testify that the leaflet would excite, stimulate and alarm the 'native mind'. The accused had offered 'the enticing possibility of taking over the country'. The African witnesses said that the leaflet might provoke disorder and bring back the days of Tshaka. Josiah Gumede, the secretary of the Natal Native Congress and editor of *Ilange Lase Natal*, thought that the African would be made a slave if the Bolsheviks took over the government. He feared a republic and placed his faith in British military power. The magistrate held that the leaflet was libellous, treasonable, and indeed diabolical; 'while the idea that a South African Lenin might conceivably be a Bantu suggested lunacy'. He sentenced each of the accused to pay a fine of 75 and undergo four months' imprisonment. The Supreme Court upheld the appeal and set the convictions aside. The leaflet, said the judge, advocated a policy quite unlike that of armed insurrection and could have had no effect on the prosecution of the war.<sup>38</sup>

Gumede left soon after the trial with an ANC deputation for England in terms of a decision taken by a special conference at Johannesburg on 16 December 1918. More than one branch had suggested that Africans should be represented at the peace conference, though Imvo ridiculed the 'Native Nationalists' for wasting their money on a foolish project which was bound to fail, as had the deputation of 1909.<sup>39</sup> Meshach Pelem, president of the Bantu Union, explained that the peace conference afforded a unique opportunity which might never recur to 'represent the vexed native question to the Imperial authorities, as well as to the Christian and the civilized world'.<sup>40</sup> Congress deputed L. T. Mvabaza, managing director of *Abantu Batho*, Seloape Thema, its editor, Sol Plaatje, Gumede and the Rev. Ngcayiya, president of the Ethiopian church, to petition the king for Freedom, Liberty, Justice and Fairplay.

They interviewed the colonial office in May and August with the usual negative results. Britain, they were told, could not intervene in the domestic affairs of a self-governing dominion. Lloyd George gave a similar answer on 7 June to Hertzog's 'freedom' deputation of eight Afrikaner nationalist delegates. These requested independence for South Africa or, if that was denied, then independence for the Free State and Transvaal. Lloyd George replied that Britain could not mediate in a dispute between sections of the South African population. 'As one of the Dominions of the British Commonwealth, the South African people control their own national

destiny in the fullest sense.' Dominion self-government, retorted Hertzog, fell far short of independence. By taking part in imperial councils, for instance, South Africa necessarily assumed responsibility for imperial policies, with all their attendant problems and dangers.<sup>41</sup>

Africans did not control their national destiny. This was the gravamen of their complaint. Gumede spelled it out in a long letter in September on the failure of their mission. It reproached Britain for having assented to the colour bar in the South African Act, and declared that the Natives Land Act had reduced them to a condition worse than slavery. 'Why shall veiled slavery be permitted in a British Dominion, under the British Flag?' he asked. 'A section of this British dominion wants a Republic, and how will the natives fare?' They objected emphatically to the contemplated handing over of Basutoland, Swaziland, Bechuanaland, Rhodesia and German South West Africa to the Union of South Africa. Mvabaza reminded Lloyd George that 93,000 Africans had responded to Britain's call for help in South West and East Africa. They had answered the call, and expected to get some benefit from President Wilson's Fourteen Points.

Lloyd George took special note of the ten kinds of passes that Africans were forced to carry: the identification certificate, tax receipt, travelling pass, permit to seek work, labour registration, monthly permit, resident's permit, visitor's permit, night pass and scholar's pass. If South Africa were under the direct control of the colonial office, he would examine their grievances very carefully. He recognized with gratitude their loyal services to the flag in the great struggle for freedom throughout the world. Referring to Hertzog's deputation, he thought that it interpreted the principle of self-determination in a very curious manner by claiming independence for South Africa in the name of only one-third of the white population and none of the coloured peoples. But Britain had to take the constitutional position of a self-governing dominion into account. He could do no more than communicate direct with Botha and Smuts on the subject of the grievances, which the deputation had presented with very great power and in clear and temperate language.<sup>42</sup>

Africans and Afrikaners returned knowing the futility of appeals for aid from abroad. Their struggle for national liberation would be fought out on South African soil. Britain's strategic and economic interests were opposed to any kind of nationalism that would weaken the alliance between Afrikaner landowners and British investors, mine owners and industrialists. Gumede absorbed the lesson. His political career took a turn to the left that led him into close association with the communists. As president of the ANC he accompanied James la Guma to Brussels in 1927 to attend the first international conference of the League against Imperialism. He travelled further, to the Soviet Union, and came away with glowing impressions

of its policy of equality and national autonomy for the dark-skinned Asians in its eastern territories. The man who had once denounced Bolshevism in a trial of communists became a firm supporter of their party. The right wing of Congress ousted him from the presidency for this reason in 1930. Many other Africans underwent a similar radical change in the stormy decade that followed the war.

\* Iron bars with chisel edge used in mining to bore holes.

\*\*The word bundu is a corruption of bundok (Tagalog and colloquial English) meaning wild and open spaces.

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